

SELECT BOARD
AUGUST 24, 2021

The regular meeting for the Select Board convened at 7:00 p.m. in the conference room in the Town Office Building at 110 Main Street. In attendance were Dr. Richard M. Smith, Patricia A. Oney, Mary K. Hull, and Town Administrator Jennifer L. Wolowicz. The media was also present.

The pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment:

There weren't any comments.

Old Business:

FY22 Select Board/Town Administrator Goals Discussion – Administrator Wolowicz:

Ms. Oney noted there are duplications between some of the categories and wasn't sure which category to keep it in, or if it really matters either way.

Ms. Oney felt in category number one, Community Relations/Communications, the most important item is managing the content on the website; assessing and coordinating community resources and services; and making office hours more convenient including one evening.

Dr. Smith felt the most important to him is managing content on the town website; increase customer access to online services; website kept up to date; and open one night a week.

Ms. Hull said she would like to see us do all of those and said to her it's the website and social media; the office hours; attending other committees' meetings; open one night a week; the webpage; and access to online services.

Ms. Wolowicz clarified all three of the Select Board members liked: manage content on town website and social media; they all liked open one night a week; webpage oversight; Ms. Oney likes: to assess, coordinate, integrate community resources and services; Ms. Hull likes attend various board/committee meetings; and Ms. Hull and Dr. Smith like increase customer access to online services. Ms. Wolowicz noted access to online services and customer access can be tied into the website and keep assess and coordinate on as she feels this will be important over the next year with the organizational flow chart.

Ms. Oney noted she feels attending various meetings is important but didn't check it as she wasn't sure just how many meetings there are and how it would be done.

Ms. Wolowicz said attending meetings could be sporadic, you don't have to attend every meeting, just look at their agenda to see what's happening and if there is anything you want information on or insight to.

Ms. Wolowicz said she will draft a final list for the next meeting.

Ms. Hull asked if something could be set up where a couple times a year have a couple of people attend the meetings, introduce themselves, and get updates on what is going on with their board or committee.

Ms. Wolowicz felt that was a good idea and felt it brings a little cohesiveness to the boards.

Dr. Smith agreed it's a good idea.

Ms. Hull noted she is still getting asked on a regular basis about zoom meetings.

Ms. Wolowicz said she sees both sides of having zoom or hybrid meetings. More people are able to participate with zoom meetings, but the side where she tends to not be a fan of it is with the oversight for her if she has to run it. If the Select Board were to choose to have hybrid meetings, she would need to have an employee run the zoom portion as it's too much for her participating with the Board the way she needs to and to run the zoom portion where you have to read the messages and look for raised hands all at the same time.

Ms. Hull noted somebody from town volunteered to do the zoom portion.

Ms. Wolowicz said if we were to do that, she would propose a policy regarding participation, stating your name and address as you do when participating in-person.

Number two – Relationships with Select Board and other levels of Government/Agencies:

Ms. Oney said it's important to maintain a working relationship with the Finance Committee and also felt it's important to work particularly with state and federal delegations on funding and other available opportunities; assess and revise the Policy and Procedural manual.

Ms. Wolowicz noted it's also the appointment of the members on those committees, as every year the policy is if you're on a committee or board and your term is expiring you get reappointed if you say you want to stay on that committee or board. Whereas she feels it's more of an elected board even though it's appointed, and other people should get a chance to run for that opening if they wish to do so and feels the openings should be advertised for others to apply as well.

Ms. Wolowicz added they have also discussed having an open house at Memorial Hall in early late fall/early winter where members of the community could come in and meet people from different boards and committees to find out just what that board or committee does and give them a couple of months to think it over and put in for that upcoming opening, giving us more representation than what we have now.

Dr. Smith noted for him, it was work with State delegations on access to funding and other opportunities; assess and revise the policy and procedural manual - especially the organizational chart; and continue to maintain good employee relations within.

Ms. Hull said she has on her list establish and maintain working relationship with the Finance Committee; work with State and Federal delegations on access to funding and other available opportunities; participate in meetings and group forums; assess and revise the policy and procedural manual; and keep people in a position for at least a year before they can transfer but understands this is a union thing.

Ms. Wolowicz clarified everyone likes working with the State and Federal delegations to access funding and available opportunities; assessing and revising policy procedure and organizational chart; Finance Committee; continuing to maintain good relationships within the staff, helping them to engage more and empowering them more within their positions and finding ways to keep them and keep them challenged in their positions.

Ms. Wolowicz said she will put this all together in a format for the next meeting.

Under organizational structure, Ms. Oney said she checked them all, and added we need an organizational chart.

Dr. Smith said he was pretty much on everything too.

Ms. Hull agreed.

Ms. Wolowicz noted there are some duplications in this list as well, and took notes to come up with the draft on this to whittle it down to something a little more manageable.

Under fiscal management, Ms. Oney said she would like to see the evaluation of long-term borrowing and debt retirement; review all fees and charges from various departments as she has never seen anything in writing and would like to know what everybody is doing; and the multi-year capital plan.

Ms. Wolowicz said she would like to see some residents in a broader position oversee the multi-year capital plan rather than town employees.

Dr. Smith said he checked off develop a gifts to the town policy; and noted we already have the multi-year capital plan and feels it's very important and he fully supports that; and maintain a level service funding.

Ms. Hull said she likes them all.

Under community development, Ms. Oney said she didn't check any of them as she thinks they were either covered somewhere else or we are already doing them.

Dr. Smith said he has the open space plan update and explore; the master plan, Memorial Hall Renovation Committee as we have recently done a lot of work there in renovating that and doesn't want to see it fall to the wayside; and the zoom meetings.

Ms. Hull said she also feels there are other committees handling a lot of these but added she would like to see updates on them, and the zoom hybrid meetings.

Ms. Wolowicz said she will go through all of them and come back with a more condensed version.

Ms. Wolowicz suggested she would like the Board to think about dropping correspondence to the other elected boards such as the Cemetery Commission, Parks & Rec., and Water/Sewer and let them know we have chosen to use this form for the Town Administrator and for them to consider it as she feels it might be a good tool for them to use with their staff members, and as time goes on it might be good to use with department heads and staff members to have a more cohesive role in performance and evaluation process for our employees.

New Business:

Approve the Minutes of August 10th & 18th, 2021 – Open Session:

Ms. Hull made a motion to approve the meeting minutes for August 10 and August 18, 2021 – open sessions. Ms. Oney seconded, and it was unanimously VOTED.

Age Friendly Communities Committee Appointment – Karen O'Toole:

Karen O'Toole of Monson approached the Select Board.

Dr. Smith noted the letter from Lori Stacy also had another person on it.

Ms. Wolowicz explained the other person is an employee of Holistic, and they already have one employee on this committee representing them, so we don't need to include them.

Ms. O'Toole explained her background.

Ms. Oney made a motion to appoint Karen O'Toole to the Age Friendly Communities Committee effective immediately through June 30, 2022. Ms. Hull seconded, and it was unanimously VOTED.

Ms. Oney asked if a person can be on a committee if they aren't a resident.

Ms. Wolowicz explained they can as an advisor and not a voting member.

Republic Contract Extension, Dan Higgins, Municipal Services Manager, Republic Services:

Dan Higgins approached the Select Board, introduced himself, and explained they have been the municipal service provider to the Town of Monson for 24 years now. Monson recently issues an RFP and put this out to bid. Republic Services responded and were the low bidder. Last year when COVID hit Republic Services decided not to change the service level or the contract rate; and they decided to leave it alone again this year. They are working with the Town on extending the current service level contract for one year allowing them to use next year to explore numerous service options to evaluate what the impact to the town would be etc.

Mr. Higgins said the Select Board has before them an extension of their current contract with an increase of 4.5%. Mr. Higgins noted their drivers didn't receive any increases last year. The State requires they pay their drivers a prevailing wage rate, and this went up by 6.8% in the last year. The disposal volume went up by 5.4%. Mr. Higgins explained our current contract with Republic is you pay one rate per month which includes them sending the truck to pick up the trash and recycling. Republic Services picked this up and it was hard for them to digest, and going forward they did adjust their rate for that volume. They discussed with the Board of Health numerous proposals in terms of trying to reduce the amount of trash in town. At this point, the current services will stay the same.

Ms. Wolowicz noted Finance Director Jamie Farnum did a financial overview of both options the Board of Health reviewed, and she recommended this option would fit within what we have in the enterprise fund and what we are collecting from the residents.

Mr. Higgins explained the recycling program noting maybe four years ago was the last time they issued a check or credit to the town for the proceeds for the recyclable. In June the town received a credit for \$87.00 and in August the town will get \$15.46 per ton for the bottles and cans, and \$48 per ton for the fiber paper/mail.

Roxanne Gunther asked Mr. Higgins what happens when Republic Services doesn't pick up our recycling or on other days when the recycling is thrown in with the trash, and wondered if the residents are supposed to report this to the Board of Health.

Mr. Higgins said it is their job to pick it up and they have had reports of that happening and encouraged residents if they see that happening, call the Board of Health or Republic Services to report it. Every call to their call center is recorded and it goes to their dispatch center to be looked at to see what happened and how to fix it.

Ms. Hull asked Mr. Higgins if he can talk about customer relations to let residents know what is being done to improve services.

Mr. Higgins explained they have had many discussions with the Board of Health over the last several months and went over the complaints and what they are doing about it. They have a Republic Service app released this year for commercial businesses and big industrial customers, and the plan for the next year is to implement this app in the town so you can say “hey, you missed me today or the truck is late”. The drivers have on-line tablets in their trucks where everything can be reported and read.

Mr. Higgins noted they have a kids recycling information page at recyclingsimplified.com that is a K through 12 educational program on the Republic Services website that’s all about recycling with videos and things that can be put on the town website developed by teachers. All the schools can use it, everyone can use it, you don’t have to be a customer of Republic Services, it’s available to everybody.

Dr. Smith asked if the contract extension has been reviewed by Town Counsel.

Ms. Wolowicz said yes, this is the same extension they used last year.

Ms. Oney made a motion to approve the contract extension as presented. Ms. Hull seconded, and it was unanimously VOTED.

FY21 Monson CDBG Grant Public Hearing – John O’Leary, Senior Planner, PVPC:

Mr. O’Leary approached the Select Board and explained his background. Mr. O’Leary said he has been working with Ms. Wolowicz and Mr. Laroche in developing a Community Development Block Grant application on behalf of the town. Through the competitive Block Grants, they try to achieve three goals; to benefit low to moderate income people, eliminate slum and blight, and disaster recovery.

Mr. O’Leary said some of the activities he has listed are how to utilize the loan assistance program which provides loans to residents in town. This is income based and provides funds for them to do home repairs. It is a deferred payment loan and after 15 years if the person remains in that home the loan is forgiven and just becomes a grant. The next one is the planning study which would hire a consultant to do an assessment of the town problematically and physically. It was noted there are some grant programs that require the town to have a self-evaluation

transition plan to even be considered. The last activity is a planning study around the OMEGA mill, hiring a consultant to do general site assessment, evaluation, potential reuse, etc.

Dr. Smith said it's becoming a necessity the town address that building before it falls into the street.

Ms. Oney asked if there was some hazardous waste at that site.

Dr. Smith explained that was cleaned up several years ago through a grant.

Ms. Hull clarified basically we are just investing in having studies.

Mr. O'Leary said yes at this point. It's been a few years since Monson has received CDBG funds, so this is rebuilding the program.

Ms. Hull asked, out of the \$800,000 what percent would go where.

Mr. O'Leary said the majority would go to the housing rebuilding program.

Ms. Wolowicz asked Mr. O'Leary to explain how the application process works and how it would be advertised to residents that this is available.

Mr. O'Leary explained if this grant is funded, they have a housing staff that will do the outreach component, mailings, and Facebook working in conjunction with the town. Mr. O'Leary noted there are 71 people on the previous grant year waiting list and feels a lot must still be interested, and therefore doesn't see an issue with the demand.

Ms. Hull said we gave Way Finders 15% and wondered if this is a similar situation.

Mr. O'Leary said yes, and the PVPC would get roughly between 15% and 20%. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission would handle that.

Ms. Oney made a motion to authorize the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to submit the proposed FY21 Community Development Fund Grant application to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development in an amount not to exceed \$800,000 to include the housing rehabilitation assistance program, ADA self-evaluation and transition study, and the OMEGA mill reuse planning study. Ms. Hull seconded, and it was unanimously VOTED.

Ms. Oney made a motion to authorize the Select Board Chair to sign all required forms, documents, and authorizations pertaining to the proposed FY21 Monson Community Development fund grant application. Ms. Hull seconded, and it was unanimously VOTED.

Mr. O'Leary noted this usually takes five to six months to go through.

Hampden County Retirement Board Letter:

Dr. Smith noted this came up at the last meeting and the Board asked to see a copy of the letter prior to voting on it.

Ms. Wolowicz noted the Board has a copy of the letter and a copy of the email exchange from Lyn Simmons, Town Manager in Longmeadow, who is one of the leads on this for the local municipalities.

Ms. Oney said she made a few corrections on the letter, and felt the letter wasn't strong enough. She read through the audit report and the one thing the letter really talks about is that Mr. Theroux basically billed the Board for staying at his own home. Ms. Oney explained this is a letter to the State Ethics Commission, and the letter is talking about things in violation of the State Ethics Laws, mostly the financial issues directly attributable to Mr. Theroux and whatever financial gain he has gotten from the things that he did.

Ms. Oney explained this letter addresses billing his Board for using his own home, staying there for a conference instead of staying at a hotel. In looking through the audit report some of the other things he did that she feels specifically need to be addressed by the State Ethics Commission is there is an allegation of finding that three Board members, not saying Mr. Theroux specifically, but she feels they need to find out who it is. The audit report said the approximate value of the hotel expense alone was almost \$11,000. In addition to that there's also some overtime costs that were paid to all of the members of the Board that the audit didn't find good enough representation or proof of that happening, but it was questioned. The other thing is that Mr. Theroux as the Chair of the Board was given a \$2,000 raise but there was never any discussion or vote at any meetings that gave him that raise. And those are the things Ms. Oney said she feels should be in the letter to the Ethics Commission.

In addition to that, Ms. Oney said she feels we may need to consider, and talk, to some of the other towns about other allegations of fraud that were brought up in the audit, and total incompetence of all five members of the Board. They paid \$90,000 in bank fees when they had millions of dollars sitting in the banks, and the banks certainly would have provided the services without fees, and Ms. Oney said she felt the issues raised in the report are ridiculous. The audit report found that they misspent over \$800,000 not including the overtime. Ms. Oney pointed out that's \$800,000 that belongs to our employees, and they aren't getting the benefit of it.

Ms. Oney said as much as she really appreciates this letter that Ms. Simmons has written, she feels we need to do more.

Ms. Wolowicz said she has a zoom meeting tomorrow with the Town Managers and some Select Board members from different communities and invited Ms. Oney to join them.

Dr. Smith suggested Ms. Oney get together with Ms. Wolowicz and rewrite the letter and felt it didn't have to match the other communities exactly.

Dr. Smith said he would be willing to sign a letter that included all the things Ms. Oney mentioned.

Ms. Hull agreed.

September Meeting Schedule:

Dr. Smith said he will not be available for the next meeting scheduled for September 14th and said the meeting could be canceled if not much is going on or it could be held without him.

Ms. Wolowicz explained at this point there are a few things she would want to hold for a full meeting such as the Animal Control vote, plus we are still working on the Veterans District.

It was agreed to go forward with the meeting on Sept. 14th and hold anything important until the meeting on Sept. 28th.

Correspondence was read and completed.

In Other Business to Come Before the Board:

- Ms. Hull said she would like to recommend or encourage the School Committee hold a symposium for the community since we have a lot of questions from people in town about not understanding COVID and the masks, are they good, are they bad, how are they hurting our kids if they are hurting them, and people aren't getting answers to these questions.

Dr. Smith said we could mention it to the School Committee as a suggestion.

Ms. Hull said the kids in town are now going through psychological issues and felt if we could find a few good professional people to talk about this and what it is that it would help.

Ms. Oney said she feels this is important. There's too much anecdotal information going around in town as well as misinformation, and to have an actual professional speak makes a lot of sense.

Dr. Smith suggested recommending it to the school committee.

Ms. Wolowicz said she would draft an email tonight to send to the Select Board prior to sending it to the Superintendent.

- On the nickel bottle, Ms. Hull said the nip bottles that people are throwing on the streets and sidewalks isn't regulated through the State, but we could do something as a community, and thought of maybe asking the Boy Scouts if they were interested in doing something with this possibly one or two Saturdays a month bringing what they find to the Swap Shack and giving them a nickel for each nip bottle collected, and felt to start we would only need a couple hundred dollars in the fund.

Ms. Hull suggested on September 19th a Lights of Hope event will be held in Veterans Field with different activities for the family, and thought if they had a dunk house and people could nominate people for a \$25 fee to sit in the dunk house for 15 minutes within the 3 hours the event will be taking place, she feels they could fill up twelve spaces and raise a lot of money to pay the nickel refunds.

Ms. Oney said she feels that's a good idea and was thinking along the same line, but somehow have people collect the nip bottles to turn in.

Ms. Wolowicz said she looked at a couple of different things since the last meeting on that and one of the things was the State would have to be the one to have the bottle bill on the nip bottles and right now that's not going to be discussed anytime soon. A local deposit isn't really legal, but some communities do a cleanup campaign, and some do nip recycling at a designated center, and feels there is definitely a way we could do something.

Ms. Oney clarified no one is going to have to pay a nickel deposit when they purchase a nip bottle, we would just like to give them a nickel back for not littering.

- Ms. Wolowicz announced she and Ms. Hull have been working together on an event through their participation on the Substance Abuse Community Partnership. On Sunday, September 19th, there will be an event called Lights of Hope in Veterans' Field run by Pam West. This event is to bring a spotlight to the drug addiction struggles that a lot of us face in our families. More activities will be added to this event making it similar to the National Night Out. Funds from the money provided from Holistic will be used to help support this event. There will be a bounce house, interactive karaoke, bands, Adams is providing burgers, soft drinks, water, there will be an ice cream truck, and a lot of information from the surrounding communities as well as Monson on resources available to families struggling with addiction. The Hampden County Sheriff's Department will also have speakers there who have gone through programs and have experience, have been incarcerated, and are now back on the path and leading a fruitful

life. The evening will end with a candle ceremony in memory of the people who have passed. This event is all free.

- Ms. Wolowicz said this Thursday she has a meeting with Rick Sullivan who is the President of the Economic Development Council of Western Mass. They will discuss the Ellis Mills, the Paper City Partners on Cushman Street, and the OMEGA Mills.
- Dr. Smith noted the Town Offices will be closed this Friday.

Ms. Wolowicz explained on Friday the office employees will be doing an organizational cleanup day.

At 8:20, Ms. Oney made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Hull seconded, and it was unanimously VOTED.

Mary K. Hull, Clerk